



**Announcement of America's First Mutual Aid Plan for Emergency Services**  
**Saturday, June 21, 2003**  
**Blue Ridge High School**  
**Pinetop-Lakeside, Arizona**

---

Good morning.

Last summer, Arizona watched in horror as the Rodeo-Chediski fire ravaged the forests and communities of the White Mountains. Today, one year later, we find ourselves facing the same deadly hazards in Arizona, but better prepared to deal with them.

For all of our preparations, wildfires are wildfires. As we commemorate the drama of last year's megafire, with all of its drama, tragedy and heroes – it is important to remember that wildfire has Arizona in its grips once again.

This week, it claimed two victims. The Aspen Fire has all but consumed the community of Summerhaven in southern Arizona, and a prescribed burn that whipped out of control last month took the life of local firefighting legend and hero of the Rodeo-Chediski fire, Rick Lupe on Thursday.

Rick grew up on the White Mountain Apache reservation and joined thousands of firefighters last year in an epic battle against the megafire. But when he designed a firebreak that stopped Rodeo-Chediski from overrunning this community, he became a living legend.

These two losses remind us that despite our best efforts to keep wildfires in check, they will consume communities and take lives if we let them.

If there is a positive outcome to last year's tragic events, it is that we emerged from it united in our determination to find new and better ways to manage our forests and reduce the threat of megafires.

I just completed a tour of the Blue Ridge Demonstration Project, in which people from across the ideological spectrum have come together to restore healthy forests to this community's urban-wildland interface. It was an impressive display of unity and smart forest management.

And now, I am tremendously pleased to announce the creation of the Arizona Fire Service Mutual Aid Plan. I am about to sign an executive order committing state government to be a part of the agreement.

This plan sets up a regional structure for fire service agencies in local jurisdictions, allowing them to reach far beyond their boundaries and limitations.



When catastrophe strikes, this plan provides for the immediate and coordinated response and operation of fire service resources to assist our neighbors in times of need.

One phone call activates the plan, so limited fire equipment resources will no longer threaten a community's safety. It lightens the burden placed upon local fire departments, and it gives communities options.

This plan is a product of thousands of hours of collaborative, grassroots effort among chief officers and emergency service providers statewide, some of whom are here today.

In particular, I want to thank the following people for their contributions and for being here today:

- Mike Casson, President of the Arizona Fire Chiefs and Chief of the Cottonwood Fire Department
- Larry Drake, Chief of the Sedona Fire District and Co-Chair Mutual Aid Coordinating Council
- Jan Hauk, Secretary of the Buckeye Valley Fire District and President of the Arizona Fire District Association
- Paul Adams, Chief Avondale Fire Department and Executive Director Arizona Fire Chiefs Association
- And Frank Navarrete, my Director of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge several people who worked to complete this plan, but could not be here today, including:

- Daryl Willis, Chief Prescott Fire Department and Co- Chair Mutual Aid Coordinating Council
- Chief Willis started advocating the need for a mutual fire aid plan in 1993
- and Mark Gaillard, Chief Goodyear Fire Department and Chair of the Arizona Mutual Fire Aid Committee.

As a document, it is not meant to contain signatories, but to offer a cooperative structure that will allow local jurisdictions relief when their fire resources are not enough.

The efforts of state fire chiefs, the state land department, fire service agencies and the emergency management community are commendable.

This plan has taken ten years to develop, but today it can be viewed as a model in regional response planning. It is not only Arizona's first-ever statewide mutual aid agreement for firefighters – it is the first of its kind in the nation.



It must also be said that this is a beginning – a lot of work remains. Awareness, education, training, qualifications, operating procedures and implementation at all levels still lie ahead to ensure that it will function as well as it is intended to.

By working together toward this common goal, we will develop a system that better protects our wildlands and forest communities both now and in the future.

We can't bring back the thousands of acres of forest burned by Rodeo-Chediski. We can't bring back the homes that were torched in Heber-Overgaard and other nearby communities. And we can't bring back Rick Lupe.

But we can move forward with a smarter plan and better coordination among our firefighters to ensure that we are doing everything we can to prevent the next megafire from overtaking our wildlands.

That resolve starts by implementing this plan, and I am very pleased to sign this executive order today, which commits state government to assist wherever it is appropriate. The Departments of Land, Corrections, and Environmental Quality, as well as the Division of Emergency Management are among those state agencies most likely to be called upon.

Thank you.